THE SPHINX OF EAGLEHAWK

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A Tale of Old Bendigo

BY

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'ROBBERY UNDER ARMS,' ETC.

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CHAPTER I

THE new barmaid at the Charlie Napier was young, very handsome, and—a lady. Any one could satisfy himself as to the correctness of the first two allegations by visiting the popular hostelry referred to. And not a few of the miners who in the winter of 1852 were working at Eagle-hawk Gully, near Bendigo, the richest alluvial diggings ever discovered in Australia, were qualified to judge; for among them were men much travelled and of varied experiences. At the famous San Joaquin placer they had drunk pulque and aguardiente to the health of the sisters Manuela and Paquita Garcia,

said to be the handsomest women in Mexico. They had danced at Quadroon balls at New Orleans, where the reckless enchantresses of the old French quarter made havoc with the gold which had been paid for with men's lives. They had sauntered through Eden-groves with the flower-crowned Eves of Tahiti : perchance had not wholly forgotten the wild-rose bloom, the fair tresses, and bright blue eyes of the maidens of their own land. But all were fully agreed that no such combination of form, face, and manner had ever before been presented to the admiration of the somewhat incongruous elements of an alluvial goldfield.

Certainly, on the first appearance of Winnie Charlesworth, for such was her endearing appellation, slight differences of opinion arose. There had been dissenters and non-jurors. But after South Sea Jack had 'knocked out' Parramatta Joe within six rounds, and Mexican Thompson had dropped a pot-valorous detractor into a sludge dam, the problem

had been held to be so far demonstrated that it savoured of bad form to reopen it.

Other critics, too, abode at Eaglehawk, closer of scrutiny, more *exigeant* of proof. These were the officials of the Government Camp. Also their intimates, the aristocratic section of the mining community, who from love of adventure or necessity had betaken themselves to digging, storekeeping, or share speculation. Among these were younger sons of good, even noble families; indeed, more than one elder brother had been so far wrought upon by glowing descriptions of the southern El Dorado as to quit his English paradise for a look at the diggings. No one could deny their qualification for the office of self-constituted judges of this momentous question, so painfully interesting to the society matrons and demoiselles, who, even in that primary stage of Eaglehawk civilisation, formed the *élite*.

Great was the wonder, deep the disbelief, scathing the sarcasm, among these

privileged personages when it was asserted, on authority, indeed publicly proclaimed, that Captain Gray the Commissioner, Mr. Hawksley the inspector of police, the resident magistrate, and, worse than all, the Honourable Mr. Clayton Carrisforth, had joined the conspiracy of admiration. Even the curate, who (just for curiosity) had a glass of beer when he was attending Jim Burton of Myer's Flat, who was laid up at the Napier while recovering from a slight mining accident, involving a broken arm, several ribs, and a collar bone, felt interested. The 'appalling fact,' as Miss Cruettson characterised the declaration, amounted to this, that Winnie Charlesworth, the barmaid at the Charlie Napier Hotel, was indisputably a lady by education and manner, if these indispensable requisites were sufficient to entitle her to the name. Of her birth, former position, or friends, no one knew anything whatever. Jack Walton, the landlord, who had been interrogated often enough to have composed

a short formula as to her first introduction, generally delivered himself as follows to any responsible customer. To the average inquirer he furnished a short and occasionally profane rejoinder.

'Happened like this. Advertised for a first-class young lady, as barmaid at a leading hotel near Bendigo. Salary three pound a week. Fust-class house and no dancing allowed. Had a dozen or two callers; none of 'em up to the mark. No style like. I was a-stopping at the Criterion, doin' the thing handsome, yer know. One morning the waiter says, "Young lady called to see you, Mr. Walton."

'"Show her in," says I, settlin' myself in the harmchair, independent and easy like.

'In she comes—my word! I was regular stunned — bows like this'— here Mr. Walton executed a wonderful obeisance, which his audience usually greeted with cheers and laughter.

'"You're Mr. Walton?" says she.

'"Quite so," says I. "John Walton, of the Charlie Napier Hotel, Eaglehawk. First and second table kept. Comfortable apartments. Liquors, best quality to be had for money."

'She smiles very quiet at this, and then says, "You wanted a barmaid at a salary named?"

'"Yes, Miss," says I. "Do you know any one as you'd recommend—character A1, and so on? Mrs. Walton is *that* particler; she must have references, you know."

'"Do you think *I* would suit?" says she—a-lookin' at me like *this*. Perhaps you've noticed, Mr. Hawksley, her sort of steady look, you know?'

'Never noticed,' answered that gentleman shortly; 'drive on.'

'"Sure you ain't made a mistake, Miss?" says I. "There's a tidy lot of work about the place, doin' up the bar and so on, and a little—well, young women has to give and take, not to be highty-tighty like, in the public line;

not as I allows any language or rough ways—but——" She held out her hands to me as I said this. They were small and fine, and you could see had been well cared for, but *she'd done work with 'em lately*. I could notice that they'd got roughened, and lost their gloss, in a manner of speakin'—something like my Missis's when she's had a week's washing. "I've had to support myself lately," she says. "I don't mind any honest work. You say yours is a leading hotel and respectably conducted. If so, I can make myself respected even—as a—barmaid." Here she holds up her head and faces me. She can look any one straight in the face, eh, Mr. Stansby?' Here there was a slight titter, as the young gentleman mentioned had essayed a little chaff one day, which had ended in his signal discomfiture. Mr. Walton proceeded—

'"Any friends or references?" says I. "My father died in the Melbourne Hospital," says she. "My only brother

was killed in the accident at the Great Extended—you heard of that?"—I nods. "I have friends in England, but I would rather not go back to them at present, even if I could raise the passage money, which I cannot. I have tried a situation more than once, and I have made up my mind finally to leave Melbourne." With that she hands me two or three "characters." She'd been servant at a lodgin'-house, she'd been nuss in the horspital, she'd been a general servant.

'I didn't ask her any more; she'd reasons of her own, p'raps; any road, that kind of work for *her*, as a blind man might know was a clean thoroughbred, and used to the best of keep, was like putting "Lady Godiva" in a wash-dirt cart. I chanced it, and here she is, the best-behaved gal, and the smartest bar-maid on the field; and if any fellow's mean enough to say a rough word before her, he's got to reckon with Jack Walton,' and here the landlord struck the attitude

of Mr. James Mace, as represented in the print above the fireplace.

'For he's a jolly good fellow!' rang out the clear tones of Tom Waring. 'We must have a bottle of fizz after that, and drink Jack's health, eh, boys?'

The appearance of such a girl in such a situation no doubt created the usual amount of speculative criticism and sarcastic remark among the members of the upper-ten feminine. This distinction may be drawn, because the male representatives of the married, and, therefore, pronounced types of respectability and unblemished morality, had mostly committed themselves to an avowal that the girl was undeniably good-looking, clever, and, as far as could be made out from a very casual inspection (that of course), of simple yet ladylike habits.

'How *can* she be a lady—and remain in that position?' angrily inquired Mrs. Rapperton, the wife of the leading auctioneer and land-agent of Eaglehawk. 'Don't tell me,—there's my husband and

the rest of you men as usual caught by her pretty face, and ready to believe anything. She's been a milliner's girl, promoted to be nursery governess in a good family at home. That's where she's picked up her airs and graces, though she's not been allowed to dine with the family, most likely, except on Sundays, and never got more than twenty pounds a year. Isn't that your idea, Mr. Spooner?'

Here the good lady turned hastily, not to say fiercely, upon one of her recreant auditors, an immature bank clerk with a pale complexion and lack-lustre eyes.

He seemed at first inclined to accept the theory of this commanding dame, but eventually stammered out—

'I can't say, really, Mrs. Rapperton—she's a nice girl, when you know her, fond of reading and all that. She scolded me one day for asking for a glass of brandy-and-water—said she was sure my mother and sisters wouldn't like it, and gave me a glass of beer instead.'

'And quite right too,' answered the irate matron, going off on another tack, as her maternal feelings swayed her. 'I wish I was a barmaid—there—no, I don't mean that — but I'd teach you boys a lesson about smoking and drinking spirits, which is the ruin of half of you, let alone men old enough to know better. However, I see you're an admirer of hers like all the rest. Young and old, you're all alike.'

Mrs. Waterfield, the clergyman's wife, thought it 'a pity that young women should be taken so much notice of who held such unfortunate positions. If the girl really was a lady, she could not reconcile it to her principles to suppose she had nothing to conceal as to her former history. As for her daughters, she was certain that any of them would have worked their fingers to the bone at needlework or starved outright, before they would have accepted such a position.' Mr. Hawksley, inspector of police, who was the recipient of this

confidence, murmured a general agreement with Mrs. Waterfield's latter statement, adding that he could not imagine any of the Miss Waterfields becoming barmaids under any circumstances.

This remark apparently did not give so much satisfaction as might have been expected. One of the young ladies referred to—the whole family being extremely plain—said rather tartly, 'That she supposed they might on occasion, if necessary, act the part without much study. It only required a little impudence.'

'Self-possession, my dear Miss Adelaide,' replied the inspector blandly, 'is *one* requisite, no doubt; but there are others. To fill the post successfully is not so easy as might be thought. We have all the greatest respect for Miss Charlesworth. Let us hope you may never be placed in so trying a position.' Then Mr. Hawksley, who had been in the army, made his most graceful bow and departed.

'I never quite can make out what that Mr. Hawksley means,' said Miss Mary Jane, the younger sister. 'He's very polite in words, but he meant that we weren't good-looking enough, I *believe*, and you put your foot in it, Addie, by saying it only wanted impudence. But I do think it very hard that a nasty girl like her, whom nobody knows anything about, and has to stand behind a bar all day, should be set up above every one, just because she's called handsome. I saw no beauty in her at church. I hate your light-coloured girls.'

'Can't bear them either,' said Miss Adelaide. The prevailing hue of the family was distinctly swarthy, with blue-black hair and strongly-marked features.

'I agree with you, my dears,' said the more cautious matron. 'But I would advise you not to talk in that strain in public. It's not altogether in good taste, and people might think you were jealous of the attention she receives.'

'Well, isn't it enough to make one?'

said Miss Mary Jane, 'though I shouldn't like to own it. But just think of that young goose, Spencer, walking to church with her every Sunday; he never used to go before. And I saw the Commissioner, who's so haughty and stuck-up he'll hardly speak to any one, bow to her as if she was a lady when he met her coming out. They say Mr. Delamere goes to lunch at the Napier every day now, and that he's in love with her, and wants to marry her. I say it's perfectly disgusting. What's the use of being a lady in this country?'

'They all say she *is a lady*, my dear,' said Mrs. Waterfield, taking up the stitches in her knitting placidly as she spoke. 'That's the worst of it. It's no use showing any irritation. Men are curious creatures. It will only make them more obstinate? We must wait, and hope something may turn up to show her in her true character.'

In spite of all pious aspiration this mysterious young woman's career moved

on, with as smooth and even development as was possible amid the somewhat turbulent elements of a goldfield.

Mrs. Walton, the landlady of the Napier, had evidently taken a fancy to her, praising her effusively to all and sundry of her customers whom she thought worthy of her confidence.

She even arranged that she should have leisure and opportunity to attend church on Sundays,—the Church of England,—where she unwittingly aroused the ire of the family of the officiating minister by the good taste of her dress and the slight tokens of respect she received.

She looked, in the pew where she sat next to the police magistrate and his wife, much like an aristocratic visitor from the metropolis, such as occasionally favoured the rising goldfield town, whose dress and demeanour during their stay were always objects of respectful curiosity. Nothing could be in better taste than her unpretending appearance

and manner; and yet on the following day she was to be seen standing behind the glittering bar-counter of the Charlie Napier, dispensing alcoholic and other beverages to a crowd of bibulous miners and wayfarers, calm of aspect and yet gravely affable,—a statue from the gallery of the Louvre,—translated, and, like Galatea, become quick and conscious.

CHAPTER II

It is not to be supposed that goldfield townships, heterogeneous as their population may be, are wholly without the lighter distractions appertaining to culture. The majority of the toilers for gold lead a hard and anxious life, yet they are largely leavened with a travelled, educated, even refined section. The humble form of public library, chiefly known as the Mechanics' Institute, is generally organised soon after the establishment of the 'field' on a paying basis. Eaglehawk had commenced with an alluvial reputation of extraordinary richness. Even now the weekly yield was exceptional. A building had therefore

been hastily run up, which comprised, in addition to a reading-room and apartments for the librarian, a hall of noble proportions, in which lectures, theatrical representations, public meetings, and last, not least, occasional 'Cinderella' quadrille parties—even state and annual balls, might be held.

The floor of Australian pine was carefully laid, and many miles of dancing had been already performed thereon by the enthusiasts of the town and district. When the bare though spacious hall, well lighted and decorated with the flags of all nations, was tastefully adorned with the noble tree-ferns of the mountain gorges, the effect was neither inartistic nor incongruous. These entertainments, when given by private persons or committees of management, were as exclusive as in more settled communities.

Persons occupied in trade were not allowed to join the magic circle. The invitations were chiefly confined to professional and official personages, with

their families and friends, and to accredited strangers. Exceptions, of course, to these, as to all other rules, would occur. Miss Binks, who was particularly good-looking, well-mannered, and popular, was admitted, albeit her father's occupation was without the pale ; while Miss Jinks was excluded, though on the same society plane. But these things happen in all places ; even the hard-and-fast line of county society in England is occasionally overleaped. One manufacturer's family is admitted, another denied, and so on. The why and wherefore, visitors and others do not discern. The reasons, however, are generally there notwithstanding.

Other entertainments, again, such as the race ball, the Agricultural Show ball, and the hospital ball, were 'mixed' as to the company, and expected to be so.

Financial reasons prevailed, particularly in the last-mentioned matter, where the proceeds of the ball tickets were

devoted to the support of a much-needed and well-managed institution.

It is not to be imagined that other than the strictest decorum prevailed at these gatherings, or that admittance was permitted to all without distinction. The committees arranged all such details with discreet despotism.

Perhaps the strong point of the great balls was the music.

Performers of various but high standards of excellence seemed to arise, as it were, out of the earth—flautists, 'cello and cornet players, pianists of all nations, while the first and second violins could have been trebled, still retaining quality.

Now the hospital ball was *the* great social entertainment of the year. People might object to race meetings on principle, and neglect Agricultural Shows, but no one could decently deny the claims of the local hospital.

Day after day had the accidents, common to mining, necessitated the sad procession, when crushed or dying men

were borne through the streets by their comrades. At the hospital they received such care and tendance as the best medical skill could devise. On the common ground of aid to suffering humanity all parties and denominations were agreed. The clergymen, ministers of the various sects, made a point of attending ; the feminine portion of their households hailed the hospital ball as that rare entertainment where duty and enjoyment were pleasingly combined. For weeks beforehand nothing else was talked about. It was, moreover, to be a fancy dress ball. There happened, by good luck, to be a gallery to the hall at Eaglehawk, placed there at the instigation of a roving architect of ability, who was employed in its construction. The expense, he demonstrated, would be trifling, the advantage considerable. So from this lofty position the more aristocratic dames, as well as temporary occupants, were enabled to look down upon the crowd of cavaliers and princesses, matadors and Moorish

maidens, belted knights and broom-girls, queens and captives, who, mingling with the prosaic nineteenth-century dresses, made up a striking and effective pageant.

The great day arrived at last. It was fine, fortunately. It had been arranged, also, to be *au clair de la lune*, so that the dwellers in the country might return safely. All the world and his wife put in an appearance. By half-past nine o'clock, too — they are unfashionably early in the provinces—the great hall was nearly full.

People made a point of attending this hospital ball who disdained all other gatherings of the sort. So that there was a kind of uprising from the social depths of a populous goldfield unexampled, nay, impossible, in any other community.

For instance, there was the Honourable Sholto Douglas, Post-Captain, R.N., late of Her Majesty's ship-of-war *Resolute*. He and Hank Ericson, of Sacramento, were mates in a 'golden hole claim' on the Myer's Flat lead.

He had taken it into his head to have a 'throw-in,' as he expressed it, for the good stakes that were going; had made up his mind to stick to work for twelve months, whichever way the luck went.

A burly, broad-shouldered man—a sort of Hobart Pasha in navy annals—he tackled the work like any other miner; lived, fared, and dug as hard as any man on the field. One of the surprises which from time to time occurred at Eaglehawk was in his case thus enacted:—

The Governor of a neighbouring colony paid a visit to Eaglehawk, partly official, partly, as it turned out, for other reasons. With him came his daughter, a handsome, aristocratic-looking young married woman. She was anxious to see the miners at their work, and one day rode out with the Commissioner through the shafts. 'This is the claim, I think,' said the Commissioner, with a twinkle in his eye.

'You don't say so,' said Mrs. Douglas. 'Only to think! But he would come.'

Now the Commissioner dismounted, and called down the shaft, 'Below there!'

'Who do you want?'

'Douglas,' was the reply.

'Pull up,' sounded from the lower depths, and the miner at the brace began to wind up the rope.

Shortly afterwards the head and shoulders of a man appeared on a level with the mouth of the shaft, and a blue-shirted, clay-stained miner, disengaging himself from a bight in the rope, appeared on *terra firma*. He looked at the lady, who, daintily arrayed, sat upon her thoroughbred horse. The Commissioner, a native-born Australian, and the grandson of a former Governor, was noted for his hackneys.

'So you've come to have a look at us,' said the miner.

'Yes, Sholto,' said she, smiling all tenderly as her eye wandered over his rude garments and clay-stained form.

'And how much longer are you going to stay in this strange place?'

'Till the year's up. Then I shall take to the water again. In the meanwhile there are chances. That man over there,' throwing a lump of clay towards the spot, 'picked up a sixty-ounce nugget last Saturday. Two hundred and thirty pounds from one blow of the pick!'

'Oh, how nice!' said the lady; 'why can't you do the same? Are you getting gold?'

'We are doing pretty well; not making our fortunes, are we, Hank?' said he to the miner who stood by, looking considerably puzzled. 'I must introduce my friend; here, Hank, this is my old woman. What do you think of her?'

Hank looked up at the handsome, refined face that smiled down on him, and, taking off his hat, made a bow expressive of intense humility and respectful admiration.

'You don't say so, Cap'en; well, the

Lord presarve her, and give us good luck for her sake.'

'A very pretty compliment,' said Mrs. Douglas, laughing. 'I see you miners are a chivalrous set of people. Are you coming to see me, Sholto?'

'You are coming to dine with us at the camp, Douglas, I hope,' said the Commissioner. 'Seven o'clock, mind. Sir George and all the camp lot, you know.'

'Depend on me—that is, if that woman's sent home my white shirt,' replied the Captain, laughing. 'However, perhaps I may say, In *any case* you may count on me.'

The lady shook her whip at him as she rode away with the Commissioner, through the heaps of yellow clay and the crowds of bearded, roughly-dressed miners under the tall, white-barked eucalypti which waved over the shafts, and which, unless they interfered with the actual working, were generally left unscathed.

'What a curious life for a post-captain in the navy and the son-in-law of a Governor-General to lead,' she said at length.

'It seems strange,' replied Mr. Gray; 'but there are scores of men here that, if you knew their name and families, it would surprise you much to find in their present positions.'

'Indeed,' she said. 'I thought my husband was, perhaps, the only officer here,—and you know what a strange, adventurous being he is.'

'The risk is only a fair one,' said the Commissioner; 'and when you come to think of the chance of making ten or fifteen thousand pounds in six months it is worth a year's hard life and absence from home.'

'I suppose so,' replied the lady absently, and as she spoke she sighed.

So when the ball really did come off many characters outside of the ordinary classical repetitions were unconsciously represented.

The Honourable Sholto was there, most correctly attired in the dress suit of the period; his somewhat roughened and sinewy hands encased in number eight gloves, looking every inch the naval officer and long-descended aristocrat that he was. Also the two friends, who, after a temporary trial at digging, had decided to earn a liberal livelihood at the congenial occupation of shooting wild-fowl, with which they supplied the Eaglehawk market at the war prices then current. One of them was an officer who had fought through the Kaffir war; the other, the son of a Lincolnshire clergyman, had taken a B.A. degree at Cambridge. They appeared respectively as a Kaffir with a sheepskin kaross and assegai, and an English gamekeeper.

John Dutton of the Blue Look-out claim, whose father had been Acting-Governor of Ceylon, came as a Cingalese coffee-planter. Major Northcote, V.C., came as a sowar of Irregular Horse, with a cuirass of chain armour, helmet, and

lance, taken by himself, in single combat, in the Indian Mutiny. Mrs. Northcote came as the Ranee of Jhansi. Doctors and lawyers, professors and savants of all tongues and nations, besides the usual swarm of tourists and travellers in every kind of travesty and disguise, joined the cheerful crowd.

It will be apparent, therefore, that, apart from the usual camp officials and their visitors, there was no lack of connoisseurs fully competent to decide upon Winnie Charlesworth's claim to be considered a lady, especially when subjected to the ordeal of ballroom dress and demeanour.

It was to this crucial test that the opposition who had ranged themselves under the banner of Mrs. Grundy secretly trusted.

'We shall see first of all how she dresses,' said Mrs. Rapperton. 'These kind of people generally betray themselves by their want of taste. She'll be either over-dressed or dowdy if she goes

in plain, or too conspicuous in fancy costume.'

'Sure to be,' chimed in Miss Mary Jane Waterfield. 'Besides, when she dances we can easily notice if she's really been accustomed to the real thing, or whether she's got the regulation quadrille party ways.'

'We can find out who are her friends, at any rate,' contributed a third feminine reviewer. 'I wonder if they'll have the face to dance with her, or whether she'll have to fall back on the boys and the bar-loafers.'

'I think you are all very foolish to show your hands, and be so—well—so extremely down on her. It looks spiteful, and only makes the men stand up for her all the more. Besides, there have been plenty of cases of great distress in Melbourne lately, my brother, who is a clergyman, tells me. Suppose it was our case, shouldn't we be glad to take anything?'

'Anything but a barmaid's place at

a horrid hotel, with people staring at you all day long,' said Minnie Mortimer.

'Staring doesn't hurt,' replied the defender of the oppressed. 'I'm not so sure that *we* shouldn't be willing to exchange starvation or general-servant slaving for good wages and an easy life, when it came to the point. Now, what are we going to wear? How many are going as Greek captives? Don't all speak at once.'

Here the conversation became general, or was so intermixed with technical obscurities, such as 'tarlatan,' 'ruching,' 'nun's veiling,' 'tucks,' 'gores,' 'flounces,' and, no, *not* furbelows, that no chronicler not in the confidence of the circle could hope to reproduce it. Meanwhile preparations were made upon a scale altogether magnificent and unprecedented. Several of the camp bachelors gave up their quarters to be used as dressing and retiring rooms for the lady visitors. Bouquets and toilette requisites, with

female attendants, papers of pins, perfumes, needles and thread — all things 'to make them beautiful or keep them neat' — were supplied in thoughtful profusion. 'It was a night superbly beautiful,' as the youngest of the escort officers quoted. The weather had 'taken up' lately.

The roads were perfect, without dust or mud.

All things seemed to assure a triumphant success.

The room was tolerably full, and dancing had commenced shortly before ten o'clock. There had been some inquiry, and glances were cast at the entrance door from time to time. But the Sphinx, as she had begun to be designated, had not yet appeared. Presently there was a slight movement immediately near the portal; more than one whispering voice said, 'There she is! she has come at last!'

Then the object of all these varied sensations entered the room, leaning on

the arm of a man who was a stranger to every one in the room.

Her dress, which was the subject of instant and eager scrutiny, was evidently of metropolitan make. It was quiet and unobtrusive, but rich in material, such as denoted a perfect acquaintance with the latest canons of millinery. She had evidently not considered it expedient to adopt any of the fancy dresses which were so plentiful in all directions. As she and her cavalier moved calmly towards the upper end of the hall, no one could fail to be struck by the unquestionable distinction of her air and carriage, the grace of her mien, while the beauty of her features and the perfection of her figure were fully brought out by the harmony of her costume.

Long before she reached a seat, she was besieged by all sorts and conditions of admirers, from Charles the First to a Red Indian chief. Matadors and marquises, soldiers and sailors, robbers and diplomates, hovered around her, each

anxious for a dance. Her card was apparently filled in a few moments. Then she stood up in the first following waltz with the stranger who had accompanied her. He was not apparently known to any one in the room, yet no one could fail to perceive his aristocratic bearing. Contrasted as to complexion, tall, slight, with dark eyes and a heavy moustache, he was in his own way not a less striking and effective personage. When he and the fair inscrutable glided off in the waltz with an easy gracefulness that told of early and familiar custom, all minor feelings were merged in an affected pity for his infatuation and her discreditable indifference to the opinions of reputable people. Had a tithe of this secret envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness been overt, some effect might probably have been produced upon the delinquent.

But, being necessarily restricted to the recesses of the fair bosoms which heaved under the influence of these

minor passions, the object of them danced, smiled, and made merry after her provokingly calm and mildly cheerful fashion, really appearing most wilfully and unlawfully to be enjoying herself.

So the music swelled, the many twinkling feet beat slow or hasty measure, according to the dictates of time, upon the ice-smooth floor of the great hall, until the first hour after midnight was reached. 'The bell of the castle tolled one,' or would have so reminded the revellers, but castle there was none in Eaglehawk, and the only bell was that of the crier of auctions—campanologist, as he called himself—and such daily commercial events. The musicians, hard worked since nine o'clock, had fallen back on the supper-room, whence they had not yet returned.

By this time all the ladies had returned from supper with such a proportion of men as held a dance in a less crowded room to be a good exchange for an

additional meal. The Sphinx was sitting with her partner, no less a personage than the inspector of police, near the upper end of the room.

'How that girl has been going on this evening!' said the wife of the chief banker. 'First dancing with that stranger that came with her, then with everybody that asked her; and now Mr. Hawksley has no more sense than to turn her head by pretending to pay her attention. What the young men are coming to I don't know.'

'Wouldn't it be a good joke to ask him to beg her to play an extra?' said Miss Cruettson. 'She would have to confess that she couldn't play, at any rate. Who'll do it? Has any one the courage? Or must I bell the cat?'

'I wouldn't do it for worlds,' said the girl who sat next to her; 'you have no idea how satirical Mr. Hawksley can be. He mightn't like his partner interfered with.'

'Then I'll do it myself,' said the

mature spinster, with acidulated decision. 'I have no idea of being defied by those kind of people!'

This is what occurred—

First, Miss Cruettson walks over to where the couple alluded to are sitting quietly talking.

'How do you do, Mr. Hawksley? I hope you have enjoyed the evening. Don't you think the ball has gone off well?'

'Thanks, very much, Miss Cruettson. I have done very fairly; haven't noticed you sitting down much this evening.'

'I have been danced to death, I assure you, Mr. Hawksley; but that is not what I came over to ask you. Would you mind asking your partner—I don't really know her name—if she would favour us with an extra. The girls are all dying for another waltz, and these horrid Germans won't have done eating for half an hour yet.'

'Allow me, Miss Charlesworth, to introduce Miss Cruettson,' he said

promptly, rising to his feet and bowing. 'She desires the pleasure of your acquaintance, and has a request to make of you.'

Both ladies bowed stiffly in answer to the suggestion, and then Miss Cruettson, finding it imperative to say something, repeated her request.

'I hardly know what to say,' said the individual thus appealed to, looking so stately and superior that the adversary began to feel uncomfortable. 'No other lady has been asked to perform, I think. Pray what induced you to think I could play dance music?'

Miss Cruettson, not easily dismayed, was yet slightly uneasy under the mild cross-examination, and hesitatingly made answer that they had really heard so much of Miss Charlesworth's accomplishments——

'You have done me too much honour,' she answered, in a tone of guarded sarcasm: 'I should hardly have expected that the ladies of Eaglehawk

would have troubled themselves about a —person in my position. However, I will make an effort for the benefit of some of my acquaintances, who I can see are longing for another waltz. May I trouble you, Mr. Hawksley?'

Taking his arm, she moved over to the piano, a fine instrument—an Erard grand—kept for the benefit of the institute and such theatrical and musical performers as might desire its use. It happened for the occasion to be in excellent tune. Seating herself, she commenced in a low soft tone, gradually rising in volume until, in a few seconds, the waltz music commenced to swell and resound through the great hall, as the keys were struck in a manner which showed at once complete mastery over the instrument as well as that power of execution combined with expression which only a finished musical education can bestow.

In a moment the half-filled room, vibrating to the strains of the 'Sonnen-

schein,' was gay with revolving couples, in the full and joyous abandonment to this dance of dances. Few thought of inquiring till the end of the music about the brilliant performer.

There was time for more than one dance to be played by other lady volunteers, besides a grand galop by Mr. Macdonald, the clerk of the Bench, who was a pianist of exceptional power; but everybody's verdict was that the first 'extra' was played with such mingled power and expression that it was unquestionably the dance of the evening.

Among those who came up to express their gratitude in the usual manner was Captain Douglas, who had treated himself to a souvenir of old times, when as a gay young naval officer at Malta he had been voted the best waltzer on the station.

As he uttered the conventional 'Thank you so much, Miss Charlesworth,' etc., a sudden change came over his face, and he said with an altered voice, 'Why, it's

never Miss ——? surely we have met before?' She encountered his look with a wistful expression, half pleading, half defensive, as she said, 'Some accidental resemblance has misled you, Captain Douglas; but you can explain all about it to-morrow, before you go back to your work.'

He bowed, in his usual courtly manner, and walked off with his much-mystified partner, a young lady who had ridden in thirty miles from her father's sheep station to enjoy this great and glorious excitement.

'Isn't that Miss Charlesworth?' she said, 'the wonderful barmaid that everybody has been talking about. I thought you spoke as if you had seen her somewhere before.'

'Mistake of mine,' quoth the Captain coolly; 'girls so much alike, that is, *some* girls,' accentuating the distinction with a glance. 'She plays dance music well, does she not?'

'I never enjoyed a dance more,' ad-

mitted the fresh, ingenuous damsel naïvely. 'How can she have learned, unless *she is a lady*, which none of the people here will admit.'

'Very good imitation, I should say,' replied the Captain. 'Strange employment for a girl like her, too. But if it comes to that, some of us are not exactly in the positions our fond relatives intended for us. Proves we ought to be charitable, my dear Miss Annesley, on a goldfield.'

'Indeed, we should. After all, what does it matter, if we do our duty and keep our self-respect?'

CHAPTER III

The ball was over and done with. But still the society magnates were exercised about the mysterious maid who had displayed the unsuspected accomplishments of dressing, dancing, and deporting herself irreproachably; moreover, had proved herself a finished musician.

What had she been? What was her real name? What her position and antecedents? *Must* there not have been a *something*—not quite, etc., about her early life and times, before she could have chosen such an employment?

Then, Captain Douglas had been seen speaking in a confidential manner to her —had even dropped a word as if he had

known her before. Of course, the Captain had known all sorts of persons in his cruising about the world. That incident of itself was held to be deeply suspicious.

All suddenly, as will happen on gold-fields, a new and engrossing topic of excitement arose. This was no less than a sudden development of rich alluvial in a mine worked by a company, which was said to transcend even the ordinary limits of credulity, stretched as they had always been at Eaglehawk.

On the great Gravel-pits lead, 'Number five South,' better known as the 'Open Sesame Company,' had 'struck it rich, and no mistake this time,' as the miners expressed it.

'Twenty ounces to the ton. The wash-dirt looked half gold in places.' New machinery, of course, required, and a new Boss was coming up. A mine manager of extended experience, who had been in California, in Mexico also, before the historic find at Suttor's Mill,

—was, of course, possessed of far more mining lore than any ordinary Englishman or untravelled Australian.

His name was romantic and unusual —Juan Montana.

When the Sphinx heard his name mentioned it was observed that she changed colour, and looked like one who had heard unwelcome news. 'Regular A1, copper-fastened underground Boss,' said the miner who brought the news to the bar-room at the Napier; 'knows how to manage wages-men; had a thousand under him at Guadalajara.'

'You ain't acquainted with him, Miss, I suppose?' continued the young fellow.

'I have heard his name in Melbourne —that is if he be the same person. I can't say I know him.' She spoke with indifference, almost coldness; but a more close observer would have noted that her colour came and went, while her lips, though compressed, trembled with excitement.

Whatever curiosity might have been

aroused by a sudden 'jump' of the Open Sesame shares was intensified by the arrival of the celebrated Mr. Montana himself. He ornamented the box seat of the daily coach, the object of respectful attention on the part of the driver, who was observed to be smoking a cigar of exceptional size and flavour. Perhaps, in general outline he did not differ appreciably from other mine managers and speculators who had qualified in California or across the Rio Grande for Australian gold mining.

A swarthy complexion, ordinary features, a heavy moustache overshadowing a well-cut mouth, the gleaming teeth in which were rarely disclosed by a smile, it was difficult at first sight to discover whence arose the distinct impression of power which the spectator carried away after the most cursory glance at Juan Montana.

In search for the key to the enigma, which some psychologists were patient enough to make, and to which ordinary

people were instinctively attracted, the *eyes of the man* told their own tale. Half open, apparently, while uninterested or at rest, the moment their possessor became aroused, or betrayed excitement, they seemed to expand and dilate. Rayless and obscure in ordinary intercourse, no sooner was the situation or the idea sufficiently stirring than the depths within them appeared to sparkle and glow with a strange but steady lustre, burning, indeed, as the tide of feeling rose with an intense and electrical fire. A weird fascination had been confessed to by those who came under his influence at such moments; then, in combination with the melody of his voice, soft and deep-toned, the charm of his smile, the mastery of his personal attraction became almost magically resistless.

As to whether Juan Montana was a desirable acquaintance or trustworthy friend, the experienced population of Eaglehawk may have entertained doubt, but his ability as a mining manager, after

the first week of his taking command of the Open Sesame, few, if any, were found to deny. His rapid grasp of the detail of the mine, his perfect knowledge in all mineral matters, and his decisive action in controlling the crowd of employés, were soon on every man's tongue. The Open Sesame took a quick rise, which encouraged the shareholders to still further outlay in developing the resources of the mine; nor was his social success less marked. He was introduced to the principal families of the town by one of the leading shareholders, who was, indeed, a considerable personage in Eaglehawk. He was voted at once a delightful person. His foreign air, combined with a certain *fierté* of manner, enthralled the young ladies and sentimental matrons of the town. They declared that he looked like a brigand chief, and indeed no praise could be higher, when one considers the helpless manner in which the more imaginative of the sex are proud to adore the hero with the regulation dash of law-

lessness about him. Thus Mr. Montana had only to throw out a few hints about the wilder side of Mexican life, lynch law, vigilantes, Indians, and masked men, to become the acknowledged master of the situation. True, no one knew much about his antecedents, but that made him all the more mysterious and delightfully romantic ; though in the case of Winnie Charlesworth the precisians of her sex, starting from the same premisses, arrived at totally opposite conclusions. This, however, is but one of the many instances in which women are treated with injustice, while men receive an equivalent of unfair privilege and immunity.

The next excitement was to discover whether or not Mr. Montana had ever met the girl who represented so much unpardonable mystery, and if so, under what circumstances, and what *his* opinion of her was. But here the stranger showed himself a master of fence,—too experienced to be taken off his guard in such an encounter.

The barmaid at the Charlie Napier—? Really, he had hardly noticed her—had just seen that there *was* one there—supposed they could not do without a pretty girl for that work. Fancied he'd seen some one *like* her in Melbourne. Charlesworth—was that her name? Indeed? Couldn't be sure. Couldn't say what position she occupied in Melbourne,—or indeed whether it was the same person. But would call at the Napier on purpose, and tell Mrs. Waterfield all about it.

'He's like all the rest of the men,' said Mrs. Rapperton acidly, after his departure. 'He *has* seen her before; but if he knows anything he won't say. Men certainly *do* keep one another's secrets in the most exasperating way. I should like to see them meet at that abominable Napier, where every one seems to go, whether they have business or not.'

Among the men, Mr. Montana's success was not so pronounced. 'A good enough mining Boss, they dared say.

Whether he was a man to be trusted largely was another matter. Not exactly a gentleman either. No, in spite of his flashy ways, and foreign airs, he exhibited occasional traits which bordered on vulgarity.'

CHAPTER IV

On the day after this conversation it so chanced that (being Saturday afternoon) Captain Douglas had finished his shift, attired himself as of old, and come to spend the day in town. He had been seen more than once in close conversation with the mysterious maid, and people said her manner was decidedly confidential —a phase never witnessed before. On this day he was seated at a table near the bar reading a late paper, with a glass of beer before him, when Montana lounged in, in the semi-Mexican costume which he affected,—a broad-leaved sombrero, a crimson-silk sash, with a sheath-knife over his left hip. Other features

indicated the Californian ruffler of the period.

'Miss Charlesworth! by all the saints of the Mission Dolores!' he exclaimed in a voice of affected surprise. 'Mustn't say Winnie *now*, I suppose. What in thunder brought you up here?' The girl looked up at him with an expression compounded half of fear, half of dislike, mingled with contempt.

Very coldly she replied—

'I am not aware that our *very* slight acquaintance gives Mr. Montana any right to address me by my Christian name, or to question me as to my movements.'

Here she turned her head to one side and appeared to busy herself with one of the shelves of her 'bottle department.'

In spite of himself a dark frown overspread his face, as he gazed fiercely at her for one moment. Then, pretending to treat the affair as a joke, he caught her hand with a sudden movement, and forced her to face him.

'You need not be so proud and ill-tempered,' he said. 'You used not to be so when you were slavey at Mrs. Driver's. You might treat old friends a little more civilly.'

'How dare you touch me?' she replied indignantly, facing him with flashing eyes, and struggling fiercely to release her arm. 'Whenever you saw me you were no friend of mine, and I disliked you then, as I do now.'

His face darkened as she spoke, and the light in his savage eyes blazed as he hissed between his teeth, 'The day will come when you will talk differently. In the meantime I must hold you fast till your temper changes.'

At this stage Captain Douglas put down his paper and touched him on the shoulder.

'I haven't the honour of your acquaintance, sir,' he said; 'but it strikes me that you are becoming rude to this young lady, whom I have the pleasure of knowing. Release her hand, if you please.'

The Captain's grasp, which was difficult to mistake for that of any but an exceptionally strong man, tightened on his shoulder as he spoke. Montana's face darkened as he dropped the girl's hand.

'Who are you? and what the devil's business is it of yours?'

'It is every Englishman's business to protect a woman,' returned the Captain calmly, 'and to kick a ruffian like you out of a decent place when he misbehaves himself.'

For one moment the gallant officer's life had never been in greater peril. Montana's hand stole to his hip, where was the terrible *navaja*, which so surely ends a struggle in the 'tierra caliente' when the antagonist is unarmed. But though almost irresistibly impelled to draw it from its sheath and dash at his antagonist's throat, his habitual self-command gained the victory.

'I don't know that the matter is worth fighting about,' he said. 'Possibly you may have cause to be of a

different opinion. But as for you,' he said, 'you'—glaring with all the fury of a balked cougar at the girl, now trembling with nervous reaction—'you may ask Baptiste and La Roche, who have heard of me, whether I ever relinquished a pursuit, and whether any one who crossed my path had reason to triumph in the long run.'

'My good fellow,' said the Captain, walking very close up to him, and looking him straight in the face, 'doesn't it strike you that all this is absurdly melodramatic? What is perhaps effective in San Francisco, or on the Rio Grande, doesn't go down here. And I warn you, before these gentlemen who have just come in, that if I hear of your annoying this young lady in future by word or deed, I'll kick you from here to the camp and back again. I'd advise you to clear out now, or I might be tempted to begin.'

This being said in open day, and before a representative section of miners,

it could not be denied that Montana's position was one of humiliation, as he took his departure with rage in his heart and curses on his lips. But the Captain was known to be one of the most powerful men on the field, utterly fearless and scientific besides. The craft which was part of Montana's nature prevented him from engaging in a personal quarrel, in which he was almost certain to be worsted.

'A quarrel *now*, Señor capitan, does not suit me,' he said, assuming the Spanish idiom which he affected at times. 'Another day I may show you and the Señora, who is too proud to acknowledge Juan Montana, that he is not a man to despise.' Here he bowed low, and, with a sardonic, mocking smile, worthy of the fiend tempter in the immortal drama, strode towards the door.

He would probably have retreated with at least a share of the honours of war had not one of the miners who had entered interposed.

This man, like himself, an ex-Californian, had indeed been celebrating a rich washing up that day with his comrades. He was, consequently, in a suitable vein for free and humorous conversation.

'Why, durn my cats! if here ain't our old friend Juan Montana—"the Don," as we allays used to call him. Put it thar, Juan, old man—enjoyin' a difficulty, as usual?—all about a muchacha too—"the old, old stor—e—e—ey." No shootin' neither. That's what lays over me. Reckon these Britishers is limited in their *idees*, and don't cotton to a free fight. The Cap here gave you a polite invitation, too. Reckon he's a bit in the Rafael Mendez line. Reck'lect Guadalajara and Paquita?'

Somehow this pleasantry of the grizzled Indian fighter—for such had been Mexican Thompson, a name known far and wide, from Suttor's Mill to Sonora—did not appear to placate Montana.

'Paquita!' he said. 'You name Paquita. Where is she now? And

Rafael Mendez,—he who insulted me before a crowd of revellers,—did you hear his fate?'

'Thought he struck it rich, and went home to Leon. He *was* rather rough on you that night, pard.'

'He lies where all the gold in California will not trouble him,' hissed Montana, in low, grating tones. 'He was buried in the Los Santos mine. Doubtless you have heard of the *accident?* Once more, Adios!'

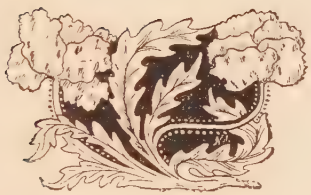
'Surmise that durned coyote was at the bottom of it somehow,' growled Thompson. 'If Rafael hadn't been as soft as he was handsome he'd have rubbed him out when he had the chance. Reckon them Mexikins don't cipher a thing out properly. So Montana's boss of the Open Sesame Company. He's a smart underground man I've heerd, but *I* don't take no stock in Open Sesame while he's thar, you bet! Captain Douglas, sir, will you do me the pleasure to have a drink with me and my mates.

We kinder heerd you "a-straightening" of the Don. These Mexikins is quick with the knife, but they ain't no count with a white man. Name your pison, Cap.'

From that time the reputation of Mr. Juan Montana suffered a marvellous decline in the minds of the genuine diggers of the field. Thompson was a representative miner with a following. They at once understood the state of the case, and accorded a very different status to the individual thus tested and found wanting. He was henceforth in their eyes a mere 'greaser,' a Spanish American creole, possibly with Indian blood in his veins: a race which they despised heartily, having found them by experience to be treacherous, cowardly, and revengeful, though lacking in courage when it came to the proof. In all respects, men of whom to be especially wary.

Montana was not slow to perceive that his popularity was on the wane. He knew to whom to attribute the de-

cline in public estimation, and cursed, with a bitter and blasphemous oath, the girl and her protector, vowing to bide his time until he could be revenged on both.



CHAPTER V

It is by no means to be supposed, though the great majority of the miners on any given goldfield are straightforward, honourable, manly fellows, that there are not commingled with them some of the choicest scoundrels which this earth, not wholly averse, it would seem, to such a crop, has ever produced. For, consider, what a heterogeneous crowd may be collected upon a spot, which, but the other day—as at Eaglehawk—was literally a 'lammermoor,' a wide grassy valley where the ewes and lambs of the adjoining station fed peacefully, disturbed but by the terrible wedge-tailed eagle, the eaglehawk of the early colonists. Hence its name.

Expirees from the penal colonies, refugees from the Old World, renegades, desperadoes, demons in human form, were certain to haste to the scene where the richest mines in the world were accessible to all for a nominal payment. If the hoards of nature were not to be rifled 'at sight,' were there not gold-buyers, storekeepers, travellers, *all capitalists*, greater or less, upon whom toll might be levied?

Now, one afternoon—at a time when the bar-room of the Charlie Napier was mostly unoccupied—four men, wearing the appearance of having travelled far, entered the room. From the first glance their unwilling Hebe conceived an instinctive aversion to them hardly short of horror and loathing. Why the feeling should have arisen she could hardly tell; but long afterwards she was heard to say that there rose up in her mind, like the remembrance of a dream, a formless tragedy, in which the darker crimes appeared to be in process of representation.

The leader, a tall man with high cheek-bones, rendered more noticeable by a clean-shaved face and a scar, slouched up to the bar and called for brandy for the party. Two thick-set, low-browed roughs flung their swags upon the floor with half-uttered oaths, while the fourth, who had a short grizzled beard, stood carelessly near the door, as if keeping watch upon incomers. Had she been in any isolated place the girl would have been frightened to death by the sudden apparition, but with a hundred men within call she smiled inwardly at her own nervousness, and served them in silence.

'Field holding on well, my dear?' said the tall man, fixing his gray-green eyes upon her. 'Keeping up its character like?'

'I believe so,' she answered shortly. 'Every one says so.'

'Heard of anything good being struck, Missie?' inquired one of the shorter men, puffing a black pipe as he spoke.

'I really can't say,' she answered,

smothering her disgust at the familiar accost. 'If you go to that house at the end of the street, the Puddlers' Arms, they'll most likely be able to tell you—a number of the diggers board there.'

'And the Charlie Napier's too bloomin' genteel for the likes of us, I suppose,' sneered the other ruffian insolently. 'Well, you can tell your boss when he comes, that you've bluffed off a crowd that can show more gold p'raps than all his kid-gloved swells put together. It ain't always the best-dressed blokes that holds the sugar. Look at this, my fine young madam.' As he spoke he half showed a gold watch and chain from an inner pocket.

'Shut your trap, you fool!' said the tall man. 'The grog's got into his head, Miss, or he wouldn't gas that way. We're poor enough chaps looking out for a show. We've come a long way, and we must wire in quick if we're to make tucker. But, tell me, isn't there a bit of a rush to Chinaman's Point?'

'Oh yes! I believe there is,' said the girl hastily. 'I'm sure I heard there was good shallow sinking there. But if you ask Mr. Binder at the Puddlers' Arms, he'll tell you all about it. Mr. Walton is away from home, or he'd give you directions.'

'My sairvice to ye, lassie,' said the tall man, falling easily and naturally into a Scotch inflection upon the words. 'Ye're a braw yin, anyhow. If there's mony mair like ye in Eaglehawk, I ken well why a' the diggers mak' for it. Come, ye thrawn deevil, and stop glowering at the puir wee doo.'

He gave the last speaker a shove as he spoke, apparently in jest, but it sent the brawny ruffian reeling through the door, and almost on to his head on the roadway. The man near the door grinned, as he noticed the discomfiture of his comrade, thereby disclosing the fact that two teeth were missing from the front of his mouth. The quartette, having picked up their swags, lounged

down the street, until they came opposite to the Puddlers' Arms, which they entered together, and from which they did not emerge that day.

When the landlord of the Charlie Napier returned he was amused by his wife telling him that Winnie had had a fight, and insisted upon details.

'They might have been Vandemonians,' he said meditatively, after smoking half a pipe of gold-leaf mixture in the course of a lengthened cogitation. 'The Lord have mercy upon 'em if Bendigo Mac gets 'em afore him. But, scissors, if we was to bother our heads about every man that's "done time" as comes into the bar here, we'd have nothing else to do.'

'These were no common men, I feel sure,' she said. 'I have a kind of presentiment that we shall hear more of them yet. I am not nervous, as you know; but I was terrified, and indeed confused, all the time they were here.'

The atmosphere of the Puddlers'

Arms proved, apparently, more congenial to the newcomers than that of the Napier, for they remained there for some time. During the day they went through the diggings, looking for a likely 'show,' in mining parlance—that is, a promising spot whereon to commence the work of a claim. Montana was seen in their company more than once, apparently aiding them in their search; he indeed lodged permanently at the Puddlers' Arms, being unwilling, for reasons of his own, to patronise the Charlie Napier.

Meanwhile the Open Sesame was rising in the market every day, and his devotion to the interests of the shareholders was in every one's mouth.

Indeed, at the last meeting of the directors, it had been carried, without a dissentient voice, that Mr. Montana, their efficient mine-manager, should receive a handsome sum as bonus, together with a certain number of paid-up shares, as an addition to his salary.

'The present position of the mine,' said the chairman, with an air of lofty generosity, 'its status in the share market, fully warranted this liberality on the part of the shareholders to their esteemed manager Mr. Montana. In the event of more brilliant results, their sense of obligation would not rest at this stage.'

The day after the meeting of the shareholders of the Open Sesame, the four men described made their way to a new lead known as the 'Blue Look-out,' where they commenced to work an alluvial claim in orthodox fashion, erected a large-sized substantial tent, and thus became component parts of the strange migratory community.

'The fiend cares for his own,' is a proverbially ancient mode of explaining the success of the evil-doer. It was apparently exemplified in the case of M'Cutcheon's party, by which description they came to be known. No particular proof arose of their being a criminal or

exceptionally immoral 'crowd,' but the verdict of the mining community distinctly pointed that way. The two black-haired, broad-shouldered men called themselves brothers. They were pugilists, it soon appeared, and had been familiar with the purlieus of Whitechapel before they essayed colonisation. The fourth man was a silent, sallow, ill-favoured personage. He rarely became confidential, save in his cups, at which time his broken hints and reminiscences were more startling than amusing. Their claim was the third on the line which struck gold after the prospector. It was generally believed to be rich. The sergeant of police, who had thrown out hints of arresting them as 'having no visible means of support,' before they took to work, was apparently mollified. All the same he was none the less satisfied in his own mind that they were gamblers, thieves, gaol-birds, and perhaps even worse.

CHAPTER VI

And now the winter weather, with its soaking rain and tempestuous winds, had yielded to the glowing greenery of spring, rich with the delicious promise of early summer in leaf and grass, in flower and fruit.

The days were longer, the surface water had dried up, the roads were smooth and pleasant; the sun rose an hour earlier and set an hour later. Travellers and tourists multiplied in the ratio of improved facilities of travelling (for the wondrous yields of Eaglehawk were still proverbial), urged on by a laudable curiosity to behold a modern El Dorado, or, perhaps, eager, by the in-

vestment of a few hundreds, to lay the foundation of a fortune.

Among the occasional visitors was the man who had come up to the hospital ball, and had excited so much comment as the favoured partner of Winnie Charlesworth. Subjected to a searching criticism, he had successfully borne the ordeal as to dress, manner, and conversation. He was tall, dark, rather pale, with a heavy moustache, and, as one young lady said, with mysterious Monte-Cristo-looking eyes. Who and what he was no one could make out. After he went away a story got about which amused some of the Eaglehawk notables, and mystified others more than ever.

Mr. Hawksley, meeting him at the Napier one day, had asked him to dine at the camp. In the course of the evening some of the young fellows, guests and others, the champagne having circulated, began talking about the curious positions in which men found themselves

in Victoria who had failed to make money at the diggings, before they had exhausted their capital.

'*Il faut vivre*, however,' philosophised the speaker. 'But what a book might be written about the avocations of some of the scions of the best families of the old country last year and this!'

'They *say* all sorts of things,' suggested a young squatter, who had ridden two hundred miles to inspect the cattle market; 'but I fancy they're exaggerated.'

'Are they, by ——?' returned the first speaker. 'I can give my own experience of last year, and of others that I have known. *I drove a cab* for six months in Melbourne; had to clean it besides, and my own horse every night before I went to bed. Got £3 a week, and deuced glad to get it, I can tell you. I'd had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours before I took the job. Wasn't Colonel Parkinson found rowing in the Custom-house boat at 10s. a day and

feed himself? I was told that De Grammont, R.A., was breaking stones on the Toorak road, when Andrews, who had been in the same battery, recognised him.'

'True enough, by George!' said Hawksley. 'I could make you laugh with things I've done before I wore the Queen's uniform for the second time, but I shall reserve my recollections till I go home. I'll come out as an author. But I can't help thinking I've seen your face in Melbourne,' said he, turning to his guest. 'I was on duty at Government House last autumn. It must have been there, now I remember.'

'Quite likely,' said the young gentleman. 'May I trouble you for the olives? I am *a water-cart man!* I had the contract for supplying the stables at the time you mention.'

There was a shout of laughter at this, in humorous denial, as it was known to the Commissioner and one or two other officials that he was the nephew of Sir ——, then in Melbourne.

'It's quite true,' said this aristocratic survival of Ali, the water-carrier. 'It's a deuced fine occupation, too, I can tell you. I'd rather not be a merchant's clerk. There are hundreds of them applying for every berth. Mine is an independent, open-air, healthful, cleanly, and profitable pursuit. I get 5s. a barrel for the *aqua pura*. I did not look forward to this, I grant you, when I left a good billet in the F.O. to tempt the main, and play at golden hazard; but what says the wise Frenchman, "If you have not what you like, you must like what you have."'

It was observed that Mr. Ravelston—such was his name (and a very good name, too, as the Commissioner wickedly informed Mrs. Rapperton)—kept very close to the Napier during the few days he remained at Eaglehawk. He enjoyed opportunities of confidential talk with the Sphinx such as were permitted to no one else; for Mrs. Walton took a turn at the bar herself, apparently that

they might have leisure to talk secrets or arrange more mysteries, as the case might be. And when Mr. Ravelston departed for Melbourne by the coach, Miss Charlesworth was decidedly 'off colour' for a day or two.

This, and other complications would certainly have driven Mrs. Rapperton and Mrs. Waterfield, with their attendant nymphs, into a premature grave from overstrained curiosity, had not a fresh sensation arisen in the strangely-constituted community, ever hungering, like the Greeks of Paul's day, for 'some new thing.'

This was a novelty with a vengeance —a shuddering terror, a tragedy, a mystery deep and dark ; none of the elements of the ancientest form of scenic effect awanting. A wealthy storekeeper had been robbed and murdered two days since at the Blue Look-out. The former probably, the latter most certainly. No ghastly evidence was deficient. Worse again, a young man, stripped, murdered,

possibly robbed too, for few men left Eaglehawk for Melbourne without carrying some of the easily-purchased gold, then selling at a large advance in Melbourne. That was bad enough. Worse remained behind. It was the young fellow who had been seen so much with Winnie Charlesworth. So that was the end of her romance!

And who had done it? Who, in this very fountainhead of universal plenty, and living made easy, had been base enough to do murder for gold, to take the precious life for filthy lucre? Hanging was too good for such scoundrels——demons in human shape—wehr-wolves and devils incarnate——! Oh for Judge Lynch! A short shrift, a long rope, and the nearest tree! Such were the freely-expressed exclamations and opinions.

Mr. Hawksley was out with every trooper from the camp; had saddled up at midnight, when the news came in, and had not yet returned. There was also a rumour that M'Cutcheon and his

party had disappeared. They were supposed to have made a pile at their claim. They always, apparently, had money. They had left a couple of days before the murdered men were found in a deep, abandoned shaft.

Then the Sphinx herself left abruptly and went to Melbourne. That is to say, she took her passage in the coach and prepared to find herself next day in that Aladdin-wondrous city. But yet another soul-stirring *morceau* of news and adventure awaited the *gobe-mouches* of Eaglehawk. Just at the top of Sally's Hill, with a wall of scrub on one side and a fifty-feet drop on the other, four mounted men, masked and armed, stopped the coach. They took the mails, and also a heavy parcel of gold which was sent down at owner's risk and not by the regular escort, to save the percentage charged.

As the robbers were lifting the mails and the gold on the packhorse, one of their masks fell off, and at the cry that

Winnie Charlesworth involuntarily gave, it was seen that she recognised the wearer.

'You can come with us, now, for your squalling,' growled the man who seemed the leader. 'You'd better have shut your eyes and your mouth too, but women never know when to hold their tongues ; none as ever I see, any way.'

Before this philosophical remark was concluded Winnie found herself lifted on to the packhorse, her head enveloped in a thick waterproof cloak, and, before the driver or passengers could intervene or protest, the cavalcade trotted off, bearing with them the mail bags, some portable property, and the unhappy Winnie Charlesworth.

CHAPTER VII

When the news came back to Eagle-hawk the excitement was unbounded. Men asked themselves gravely what the deuce was the country coming to? Here was murder done under their very eyes and the murderers at large! A mail coach robbed, the gold earned by hard and honest labour handed over to a gang of thieving scoundrels! It looked as if the same crowd had put up the two crimes; and now here was this poor girl, whom every man on the field respected, carried off and might never be seen again. 'By Heaven! lynch law was the only cure for this state of things, and as God made them, they should have it!'

The miners of Eaglehawk were not given to talking merely. They meant more than they said. And in a couple of hours fifty men, well armed and mounted, were on the trail of the robbers. It was known which way they had gone. They had a long start, but among the pursuing party were several native-born Australians, to whom the pathless wild was like a printed book. They could track and follow horses' or men's steps like the swart children of the waste, their aboriginal countrymen.

These men, mostly reared at the cattle stations of the far interior, showed their ability not only to follow the path taken by the fugitive mail-robbers, but, to the amazement of the Europeans, to tell how they were presumably occupied by the positions of the hoof-marks of their horses.

'They were going their hardest last night,' one of these men said, pointing to the tracks after they had followed at

best pace until near sunset. 'There, you see, they rode over the creek, under that tree, which must have pulled some of them nearly off, it's that low. This horse was getting nearly done,—him as carried the gold, I expect. See how deep his hoof-marks are; and here he's been on his knees, and ploughed up the ground a bit. I shouldn't wonder if we ran into them before this time to-morrow night. The ground's getting heavy riding towards the ranges.'

The men around him listened silently, and pressed on with grim determination. They had brought with them food sufficient for the period the hunt would last, and but little time was wasted either by day or night when the track could be made out.

About sundown on the second day they came to an apparently deserted hut. The scent had been growing hotter and hotter the last mile. The five Australians, who were responsible for the direction along which the main

body rode blindly, had given it as their joint opinion, with slow deliberation, that they would pull them up within another couple of miles. This gave spirits to the leaders of the party, who put on increased pace. So that when the hut, standing in a rocky flat, was gained, and three horses were seen feeding near it, with a packhorse tied to the fence, every man knew that the quarry had been run to earth.

There was a rush for the lonely hut, but the door was shut, and no one cared at once to ride closely up to a fastness, however rude, which would give desperate men a secure coign of vantage from which to fire at leisure.

However, one horseman put a handkerchief on the end of a stick, and volunteered to treat with the besieged. Riding up to within twenty yards, he called on the inmates loudly by name, and demanded if they would yield in Her Majesty's name and that of the committee of the 'Vigilantes of Eaglehawk.'

'You'd better come and take us,' was the reply, and with it a bullet, not, perhaps, aimed at the ambassador, came sufficiently close to cause that gentleman an involuntary shiver. At this unconstitutional act, going near to injure a herald, the sense of the community was so shocked that a rattling return in the way of small-arms was at once made. It soon became apparent that the outlaws had a position of advantage; they were protected by the thickness of the slabs, while at the same time many were afraid to fire lest they should injure Winnie Charlesworth.

At length it was resolved to 'rush' the citadel. A score of men held themselves in readiness, and after a closely-concentrated volley, a sudden charge, and a smashed-in door with a gum log used as a battering-ram, carried the place by assault. It was not done altogether without loss on the part of the attacking party. One man was shot through the body, another wounded in the arm. A

bullet passed through the cheek of another, inflicting a terrible-appearing wound; but, strange to say, without fatal effect. The three men were seized and hauled out before the avengers of blood.

There were but two rooms, in one of which the gold package was found. Both were thoroughly searched. It was impossible that any one could be concealed. Where was Winnie Charlesworth?

'Have you murdered the girl, like that poor devil of a storekeeper and the young fellow?' shouted one of the foremost pursuers. 'By gum! it would be a good deed to roast you fellows alive, as they do in some countries I've been in. Here, put that rope round this chap's neck, and haul him up over that limb. He'll soon find his tongue.' The rope was actually placed over the struggling wretch's neck, when he volunteered an answer. 'Two of us ran slap agin that infernal inspector and his men, five miles

after we left the coach. He's got the girl. We had to cut and run, and left her behind. We'd sent on the gold another way, so as we could meet here.'

'Wal, reckon you've saved your necks this time. It's hardly worth stretching them and getting ourselves into a mess if the gold is all right and the girl too. No thanks to you, all the same. Now the thing'll be to take you back to the logs at Eaglehawk, and then you can sing your song to the judge, and see what he says. Hold up your hands.'

Judge Lynch was not called into requisition upon that occasion. There was a forced march back to Eaglehawk, where the three men were delivered, with their hands firmly tied, to the regular authorities.

CHAPTER VIII

The next pressing question of deep public interest was that of the discovery of the actual murderers of the store-keeper Saunders and the young man whom everybody believed to be Ravelston. The trial was arranged to come on a couple of weeks after the re-capture. There was a certain amount of circumstantial evidence, and the men would be put on their trial for murder, but (Judge Lynch being superseded) there were grave doubts as to the issue.

Mr. Hawksley was obliged to confess to an *embarras de richesse* in the shape of first-class criminals for the only time in his experience. The men who had

robbed the coach were safe for twelve or fifteen years' imprisonment. They had 'done time' before, evidently. Robbery under arms was a serious affair,—only short of murder, to which it might well lead. The carrying off of Winnie Charlesworth would have been an abduction, *if it had succeeded*, but it did not. Therefore they were not likely to come in for a heavier sentence than ten or fifteen years' imprisonment with hard labour.

But the murder of the storekeeper Saunders was a widely different matter, —a cold-blooded deliberate crime, which the perpetrators should expiate dearly. His blood cried aloud for atonement. An inoffensive young man, of birth and character, had also been foully murdered. He, Edgar Hawksley, would run down the men who had committed these awful crimes if he had to search Australia from one end to the other, and New Zealand to boot.

Who were the men most likely to

have done the deed? He ran over in his mind the criminal class in Eaglehawk, most of whom he knew 'like a book.'

Among other suspects were the four men who had come into the bar of the Charlie Napier on the day formerly referred to. They had left the Blue Look-out and had gone to Pennyweight Flat, Beechworth, making no secret of it —in fact leaving word as to their movements. They had been seen at Beechworth by some roving Number Four man. There was nothing singular about that. They had left no debts. They had in some ways made themselves popular wherever they had been.

One of them, indeed, had been left behind. He had been injured by an accidental fall of earth, which had broken a rib, and prevented him going on a journey just at once. He had remained sole occupant of the tent at the Blue Look-out. He was able to state, in answer to Mr. Hawksley's pointed inquiries, that his mates had left early on

the morning of the 10th, and that he was sorry he could not join them, and go too.

In sheer despair, Hawksley had managed to have a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Charlesworth, who was now staying as a lodger with Mrs. Walton, not being minded, just at present, to leave Eaglehawk, until she had recovered from the late shocks to her nerves. 'Had she observed anything peculiar about M'Cutcheon's party? Did they show any money or ornaments?'

Beyond committing herself to the statement that the four men were in all respects the most ill-looking and repulsive persons she had ever seen, and that they awakened in her the strongest feelings of disgust, she had nothing to tell.

'That was all very well,' Mr. Hawksley said; 'most natural indeed! But had she *seen* anything, noticed anything in their appearance which could give a clue?'

'No, nothing! Nothing that she could

remember, except—oh, now she remembered, one of them, being angry that she appeared to slight them, had half pulled out a gold watch.'

'What sort of a watch? Was there a chain attached?'

'Yes, it was a beautiful watch; valuable, she should say—not a common one—with a heavy gold chain.'

'What man was that?'

'One of the short, dark men. He put it back in his pocket as soon as the tall man with reddish hair spoke to him.'

'Was it true that the young man who was killed was Mr. Ravelston?'

'No, certainly not. She went to see the poor fellow, and, though not unlike, it was not Guy Ravelston. *She* knew better, but, all the same was uneasy, as she had never heard from Mr. Ravelston, who had promised to write, since he left for Melbourne.'

'That was strange, was it not?'

'Yes; she could not account for it. It made her unhappy, but she would not

suspect evil had happened to him before it was proved.'

Mr. Hawksley made his customary courteous and most respectful adieux, and departed, thinking over what he had heard.

He sent his two black trackers to re-examine the spot where the storekeeper had been found dead, and listened to their report with intense interest.

After a long deliberation and a consultation with the sergeant of police, warrants were signed, and a trooper sent off to cause the arrest of Reuben and Samuel Hannaford, together with George Hewson, generally known as Badger.

At the same time M'Cutcheon was placed under surveillance, and orders given to be prepared to arrest him on suspicion of being concerned in the death of Israel Saunders, as an accessory before the fact. Meanwhile, in a few days, the other three prisoners were brought in. Hawksley smiled sardonically when he saw in the report of the apprehending

constable that a gold watch and chain, apparently of considerable value, had been found on the person of Reuben Hannaford.

To his quick mental vision and rapid power of deduction from apparently trifling circumstances, nothing was clearer than the fact that the four men—M'Cutcheon's party, as they were called—had committed the murder of Saunders the storekeeper, and the young man, unknown, previously supposed to be Ravelston. How to get at the evidence was now the difficulty.

After some deliberation, and an interview with the police magistrate, he appeared with a warrant for M'Cutcheon, with which he despatched a trooper.

In a couple of hours he was once more in durance, albeit the lock-up at Eaglehawk was a very modest edifice compared with some he had adorned previously. He was still recovering from his ailment. Presumably he was nervous and low-spirited, dreading, per-

haps, the result of the law's vengeance, now once more in motion.

When the inspector came forth from a lengthened interview with him, that officer's countenance was radiant, like that of one who has just heard good tidings or become possessed of an unexpected legacy.

'M'Cutcheon has squeaked.'

These were the remarkable words in which he made known to the sergeant that the noted criminal had thought it best to secure his own immunity by giving up his companions and permitting them to bear the burden of their crime.

Thus Mr. Hawksley had indeed sufficient cause for congratulating himself on the mingled acuteness and audacity which had enabled him to bring these notorious offenders to justice. M'Cutcheon, finding that he was entangled in the same net as the others, and fearing for his life unless he made friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, had made a full confession. The inspector had an entry

made of what evidence the prisoner was prepared to give, had it read over and signed by him in the cell, and, on the day when the prisoners came down the principal street of Eaglehawk, each man handcuffed, and his horse led by a trooper, a whisper ran through the fast-assembling crowd that these were the murderers of Saunders the storekeeper, and the poor young fellow whose name had not been discovered. It was with difficulty that they could be safely lodged in the lock-up, as the crowd pressed upon them, and with yells and hoots declared they were not worth a trial, and should be hung up to the nearest tree.

CHAPTER IX

As luck would have it, the Circuit Court was to be held at the neighbouring town of Sandhurst in the week after next, so that all these various mysteries of love, murder, robbery, and revenge would be satisfactorily settled, or, at any rate, dealt with in some way or other, to the great comfort and satisfaction of the Eaglehawk community.

It was generally understood that M'Cutcheon had turned Queen's evidence, and was ready to make astounding confessions at the trial. Israel Saunders was a large shareholder in the Open Sesame claim. He had sold heavily at a high rate some few days before his

death. It was not known to whom he had transferred his shares, but dark rumours began in an undefined and formless manner to connect his name with the manager, with whom he had been, it was said, on terms of more than friendly acquaintance.

Then again, there had been men in the mail robbery whose masked faces were never seen. They had fled on meeting the police, leaving Winnie Charlesworth behind them. One of them had been hard pressed by Mr. Hawksley, but for fear of missing the gold (of course the important element of the affair) he had relinquished the pursuit. Was there *any one*, again, who, for his own designs and purposes, had any interest in the abduction of the Sphinx? For, why else should they be bothered with a girl, when four or five thousand ounces of gold were in the balance?

This was a feminine suggestion. It really seemed as if, outside of the banks

and shares and claims, there was nothing and nobody fit to be talked about at Eaglehawk except this wonderful ex-barmaid.

'They *did* think they had got rid of her for good and all, and now she was back on their hands, more troublesome and annoyingly interesting than ever. It was too vexatious.'

This was Mrs. Waterfield's remark. Everybody looked forward to the Circuit Court, which, always the exciting event of the quarter, was now invested with a special and absorbing interest.

After the longest week which anybody could recollect had passed away, the memorable assize commenced, on the first day of which the Chief Justice and his suite, Associate, Crown Prosecutor, barristers, and other comparatively important legal personages duly arrived. Although Eaglehawk was not deficient in sensational events in a general way, the Sandhurst Assize Court was a welcome relief from ordinary goldfields'

town talk and occupation. There was always the Chief Justice's dinner, to which the leading residents and officials were invited. There was an Assize ball, where the younger barristers, the Judge's Associate, and other agreeable strangers of mark made a sensible difference in the competitive partner arrangements.

Now there was sure to be a week's Court work at least—work of the most exciting nature. All the upper ten, and many ranking socially at a lower level, made up their minds to see as much of Sandhurst as possible during the sitting of the Court.

Great discoveries would no doubt be made. Mr. Hawksley, with habitual reticence, had permitted no avowal to go forth. He invited no confidence, and repressed all curiosity in a carelessly stern way.

'They would hear all about it at the proper time and place.'

At the first day of the sitting the Court was crowded. There were almost

as many women as men. When the first case was called, and three men, heavily ironed, were brought into Court and placed in the dock, a perfect and utter silence reigned. The only voice heard was that of the Court bailiff, who, anticipating the usual buzz, called out 'Silence!' in a fiercely authoritative manner.

The Crown Prosecutor opened the case in a clear, forcible, yet unlaboured speech. He first drew the attention of the jury to the nature of the indictment. One of the most cowardly, cold-blooded murders had been committed, that had, even in the worst days of Bendigo, rarely been paralleled. Gain, greedy, debased, inhuman lust for gold had been the main factor in the affair, doubtless. The murdered man was known to be rich, to have portable property of great value, like many other men in these uncertain gambling times.

The prisoners would be proved to have been aware of this fact, to have

been well acquainted with the nature and extent of his resources, to have joked him about the place where he kept his nuggets, and so on.

'Circumstantial evidence was in its way most valuable,'—here the learned counsel quoted Taylor on Evidence,—'but he would have more direct proof to offer—proof most convincing and conclusive. Call Alexander M'Cutcheon.'

A smothered exclamation seemed to arise from the crowded Court, as with inexpressive face and uncertain steps the man who had always been considered the leader of the party walked towards the witness box. The prisoners were evidently taken by surprise; more than one expression of measureless contempt and hatred broke from them.

'I request your Honour to permit the witness to sit down after he is sworn,' said the Crown Prosecutor. 'His state of health is such that he would be unable to stand for more than a few seconds.'

The permission being granted, the learned barrister proceeded—

'Your name is Alexander M'Cutcheon, and you know the prisoners before the Court, with whom you have been associated as mining partners?'

'Yes.'

'When did you see them last, and where?'

'On the morning of the 8th of November at the claim on the Blue Look-out.'

'Tell his Honour and the jury what you saw the prisoners do on that particular morning.'

'Stop! was Israel Saunders there?'

'He was.'

'Now, go on.'

'On that day,' said the witness, speaking with an amount of self-possession that showed that he was not unfamiliar with Courts of Justice, 'I awoke early, not being able to sleep on account of a bad back caused by a heavy fall of earth in our claim. I was partly paralysed for some weeks, and am only

now getting about. I had not been out of the hut for a month. The night before, the deceased had been playing euchre with the three prisoners. He was a sober man, but a great gambler, and would play with any one. He didn't know that two of the prisoners had been tried for murder before, and the other had served a long sentence for robbery with violence. If he had it mightn't have made much difference. People don't mind these things on a diggings. Anyhow he won a lot of money from them overnight, and I saw Hewson hand him a bag of sovereigns. It was a wash-leather bag branded "Los Angelos." He'd got it from a Yankee miner. He came in that morning, and they wanted him to stop and go with them to the Woolshed. But he wouldn't. Something he saw the night before frightened him, I expect. So he refused—spoke rather surly, I thought. Reuben said to him, "Why, you look all dressed and ready to start."—"So I am," says

he. "I'm going in an hour. Bill Baker's cart is coming to load up at the tent. I'll ride on before. So good-bye."

'Reuben Hannaford looked over at Hewson, and then said to Saunders, "Just come over to the side of the Gully for a minute. I want to speak to you about a 'show' I was laid on to."

'He said, "All right," and they walked to the edge of the Gully. There was a lot of deep shafts, some of 'em partly filled up, some fallen in. I was lying in my bed all this time, wasn't supposed to hear anything; but I kept my ears open, I tell you, and my eyes.

'As they walked down the Gully I saw Reuben's brother Sam and Hewson leave the place and follow them up quickly. Hewson had something under his coat sleeve. It wasn't very long. All of a sudden he walks up from behind and strikes Saunders over the head. Down he goes, like a bullock. He gives him

another crack or two as he lay on the ground, and he never stirred again.

'My word! I felt faint. I had crawled to the door of the tent and looked out. I saw the other two prisoners go carefully through his clothes. One of them got the wash-leather bag, and he seemed to put most of the good things into that.

'One of them, Reuben, said, "I never expected the bloke would be such a fool as to carry all this on him." Then the two brothers and this man,' pointing to Hewson, 'raised the body in their arms, and carried it to the old shaft of No. 17, and threw it down. It was a deep shaft—ninety feet, and dry. I heard the thud as he fell in the tent, quite plain.

'I was creeping back into bed, I didn't want them to see me. I wasn't quite sure how I should come off; and just then, as his bad luck would have it, down came a young man (I don't know his name), quite innocent and unsuspecting like.

'"You're up precious early," says he, "early bird," and all that. "What are you looking at in that shaft?"

'"Come over and I'll show you," says Hewson. With that he came over and he gives him—oh! the villain!—a tremendous knock on the back of the head. Down he falls like a log. They treated him the same way. He was dead almost directly. His skull was fractured. I felt as if I must rise up and call out when they chucked the second man into his unnatural grave and turned to come back home. I crawled back, and crept under my bed-clothes.'

'These men are not on their trial for the murder of any one but the deceased Saunders,' said the Crown Prosecutor. 'But perhaps in the interests of justice your honour will allow me to ask the witness if he had ever seen the young man before?'

'Not to my knowledge. I did at first think I had, he was so like another young man I saw at the Charlie Napier

one day. I thought it was him at first, and so I expect did they.'

'Who was the other man that he so closely resembled?'

'Begging your Honour's pardon,' said the witness with an awkward inclination, 'that gentleman there in the gown,' pointing to the Associate. 'He was a tall, dark young gent, rather pale, and with a black moustache like this one here.'

At this announcement there was a general motion of surprise in the Court. All eyes were turned towards the Associate, whom all the Eaglehawk people, for the first time, recognised as the stranger of the hospital ball, and Winnie Charlesworth's admirer, Mr. Ravelston.

'So they were very like one another?'

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Ravelston,' said the Crown Prosecutor, 'for drawing attention to you on this public occasion, but I have a deeper reason than appears on the surface.'

'Why did you think, witness, that the

prisoners here took the deceased for Mr. Ravelston? May I trouble you to stand up, Mr. Ravelston, and to remove your gown for a moment?'

'From the way they talked when they came in.'

'What did they say?'

'Hewson spoke first. "We've made a good touch," says he. "Saunders had £900 odd on him, besides my Yankee bag with the sovereigns. The young chap hadn't much, but he's good for a hundred and fifty."

'"How's that?" says Sam Hannaford.

'"Why, didn't Montana tell us that if we could wipe out the young fool that Winnie Charlesworth was going to be spliced to, he'd stand a hundred and fifty quid, and make it up to three if we could run off the gal herself?"'

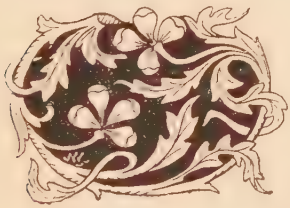
A profound sensation made itself apparent in Court as these words were spoken. Mr. Montana, who was among the spectators, could not conceal a slight change of countenance. Twirling his

moustache, however, he fronted the Court with an air of haughty indifference, which, for the time, held opinion in suspense.

'Then Sam Hannaford says, "That's good enough; but are you cock-sure that young chap's the man?"

'"Just as sure as that the other one's Saunders," says he. "There can't be two men so like one another on the same field. Anyhow he deserves what he got for pokin' his nose into business that didn't concern him!"'

Here the witness fainted from weakness, and the Court was adjourned.



CHAPTER X

Mr. Montana stepped jauntily forth, but, as he left the building, Hawksley touched him on the shoulder, saying, 'Just come here for a minute, dear boy! I've a word to say to you away from these fellows!'

Montana looked at the inspector for a moment with his piercing eyes before he broke into a short laugh. 'Caramba! is this a theatre or a court? The drama is effectively represented.'

'As a melodrama it's deucedly amusing,' said Hawksley, with a flicker of grim humour playing round his mouth, 'if it doesn't deepen into tragedy. That's where the disappointment may come in.'

He opened the door of one of the smaller rooms in the court-house, and half-playfully pushed his companion forward.

As Montana entered, and while his companion stood at his back laughing, two troopers, who had been apparently posted at opposite corners of the room, placed their arms on his shoulders, and he found himself virtually arrested.

'What the devil is the joke?' he said, struggling fiercely for a moment, which gave opportunity for a third man, who had silently appeared, to clasp a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

'A *mauvaise plaisanterie* at best,' said Hawksley, stroking his moustache, 'but, well-worn as it is, we must make the best of it.'

'Juan Montana!' he continued, with a sudden change of tone, 'I charge you with being an accessory before the fact in the murder of a man whose name is at present unknown, but who can be identified.'

For one instant, as Montana turned and confronted his captors, his features wore an expression of rage so demoniacal that his whole countenance seemed to be changed. The troopers involuntarily shrank back as he tore at the handcuffs for a few seconds with a silent rage and strength which seemed nearly sufficient to rend them asunder. Hawksley merely smiled, and twirled his cane. This was a day of state ceremony in Sandhurst, and the inspector was got up with due respect for *les convenances*.

'Can't you see,' he shouted, 'that this is a planned thing, a made-up affair between M'Cutcheon and the Sergeant? Why should I be deprived of my liberty, because a criminal with a rope round his neck chooses to swear that I belonged to his own or another gang; because a young man with dark hair has fallen down a shaft? How many young men with dark hair have come to grief on this field? I lament this, but I am not responsible.'

'You are arrested, my dear fellow,' said Mr. Hawksley, in a tone of grave and courteous warning, 'upon a warrant, which will be produced, and which was granted upon a sworn information. There are these formalities, you know. Most likely nothing in it. But, in the meantime, you must go with me. You are too much a man of the world to cause unnecessary trouble.'

Montana had by this time turned ashy pale. A twitching of the facial muscles alone showed mental discomposure. His eye still shone with glowing fire as he said with assumed calmness—

'And when will the next act of this farce come on?'

'To-morrow, or the next day, if these other inquiries are concluded. Meanwhile, you must—sorry to be imperative, but I am responsible for your safe keeping—be, in point of fact, locked up.'

Mr. Hawksley gave a sign, and between the two mounted constables the picturesque Mr. Montana was marched

over to the lock-up, a place of temporary detention only, where his personal effects, coins, watch, ornaments, and papers, were, in accordance with police rules, taken from him. At a later hour he was unobtrusively removed to the Sandhurst gaol, a high-walled and castellated structure, of which the inhabitants were justly proud, as having cost more money than any other penal structure in the colony.

While this 'side show' was in action, the main dramatic performance was proceeding without greater delay than was caused by M'Cutcheon's temporary collapse.

He was soon restored by the aid of tonic stimulants judiciously administered, and was enabled to return to his place in Court. His evidence-in-chief being completed, the witness was subjected to a severe cross-examination by Mr. Archbold, then considered the best counsel in criminal cases in the colonies. He had been brought up from Melbourne especially. No trifling sum was marked

on his brief, but money was not spared, great as was the expense. That the task was not a congenial one it may well be believed, but the great advocate did his duty with the same conscientious care that he would have bestowed upon clients of undoubted innocence. He succeeded in damaging the witness's character materially and effectively. He proved him to have been a thief, a forger, a criminal, determined and incorrigible, since his earliest boyhood. Much of this M'Cutcheon frankly admitted. 'He had been,' he said, 'quite as bad as the prisoners, or as any other men of his class, in all but this, that he had never shed blood for gain. This was a different thing: a cowardly and cruel murder—of a friend who had been kind to them (more fool he), and of a poor young fellow, a total stranger, who had never done them any harm—he could not conceal. No!'

He was *not* ashamed to bear witness against men who had acted like devils out of hell. He had told plenty

of lies in his life, but every word he had sworn to this day was God's truth. Here the witness lifted up his right hand, and, not without a touch of natural dignity, repeated the terrible formula of the oath used in the Scottish Courts, familiar to him in his earlier manhood, concluding with the adjuration, solemnly pronounced, 'As I shall answer it to Almighty God at the last day.'

The effect was rendered more impressive by the ghastly pallor which overspread the witness's countenance as he concluded this sentence, and by the sudden faint which again took place, rendering his fall upon the floor as nerveless and unprepared as that of a dead man.

The counsel for the defence lost no time in stating that he had no more questions to ask the witness, who was promptly carried out into the open air, and the case proceeded.

Other evidence followed. The prisoners, particularly Hewson, had been found on their arrest to be in possession

of certain articles of jewellery, a purse and ring, which were sworn to as having belonged to the deceased Saunders. They had, before witnesses at the 'Woolshed' digging, given contradictory statements as to their intimacy with him. The medical evidence showed that there was an incised wound, also a fracture of the skull, on the back of the head of the deceased, which had probably been caused by a blow from a blunt instrument. Would not swear that it might not have been caused by falling upon some hard substance, such as might, possibly, be at the bottom of a deep shaft.

Much evidence of an apparently trifling circumstantial nature followed, but all leading to one issue, all tending to fasten the guilt of this hideous crime upon the three prisoners, who, unabashed and defiant, stood in their appointed place, hour after hour, watching every word that was said against them, yet gazing from time to time at the crowd that filled the Court, as if they were

wholly uninterested in the result of the trial.

Next morning, immediately after the opening ceremony, Mr. Archbold addressed the Court for the defence—a long, patiently-argued, very powerful speech. He particularly drew attention to the fact of the witness for the Crown, upon whose testimony the lives of these men depended, being wholly uncorroborated. He was, even by his own admission, a man of bad, even infamous character. Was the word of such a man to be taken in a case like this? Might there not have been some quarrel about the division of spoil? The probability of robbery he did not deny, but they were not here to defend themselves against a charge of dishonesty; it was an allegation of bloodshed—of cowardly and deliberate murder. This they were asked to believe, as against the three men now in the dock, on the word of a forger, a thief, a swindler, a gaol-bird; and now this habitual criminal was about to add

to his record the hated character of false witness and informer.

Mr. Archbold went on, ringing the changes upon this for hour after hour, till the jury came to believe M'Cutcheon to be the lowest scoundrel that ever trod the earth. The Judge summed up just before dark; the jury, after being out about an hour, brought in a verdict of guilty against Hewson (who was hanged within two months), and of *not guilty* as against Reuben and Sam Hannaford.

They were discharged. Some one complimented Mr. Archbold upon his success. 'I never defended greater scoundrels in my life,' he said. 'Speaking as a barrister, I suppose I experience a certain gratification in winning my case. But as a man, a private individual, I feel the deepest regret that they have escaped the gallows.'

Some kind of instinct must have urged him to say this. Fifteen years afterwards, that very Reuben Hannaford was found to be identical with ——, one of the

members of the New Zealand gang of Thugs (as they were called)—a body of men that had committed a number of the basest, cruellest murders. Sullivan was the wretch allowed to turn Queen's evidence. How many murders might not these double-dyed, remorseless villains have committed between their discharge at Sandhurst and their execution at Auckland?

Hewson was hanged, as I said before, and to that extent the *manes* of poor Saunders were placated. The young man who was murdered at the same time was afterwards discovered to be a Mr. Dorcott. He had only lately come from England, poor fellow! and was the son of a West of England clergyman. His letters and papers found in his tent proved all about him. Everything was forwarded to his father, and the money he had in the bank —a poor consolation—was sent home too. M'Cutcheon was well provided for. He was sent out of the country with a character which helped him to lead a new life.

CHAPTER XI

Now that all the murder element of the business was disposed of, society in Eaglehawk betook itself cheerfully to the consideration of the scarcely less engrossing theme of love, with variations of course.

Apparently this was to be the last appearance of the Sphinx upon the boards of their theatre, so to speak. No sooner had the Judge taken his seat, when it was apparent to all that he had provided himself with a brand-new Associate. The last one was short, fair, and of a ruddy complexion — name Judson. This one was tall, dark, and romantic-looking. Such a man's name *could* not be Judson. The mystery was soon solved. One of

the young ladies heard Mr. Hawksley say to one of the camp officials, 'By Jove, it's *the water-cart man*. You remember him at our mess one night at Eaglehawk?'

To which the other man replied—

'Of course, the Judge is his uncle. Capital fellow, Ravelston. Deucedly hard up for a time, but money left him lately. Study for the bar, and all that. Judge made him Associate; give him lift while he's reading up, don't you know.'

'So the (other) murder was out. This was the man who came up from Melbourne, and danced with the Sphinx at the hospital ball. It explains him, but doesn't explain her. What do you think, Mrs. Rapperton?'

'Oh dear,' said Mrs. Waterfield, almost tearfully. 'I'm afraid we've been doing the poor girl an injustice all this time. I had a letter from Mrs. Clearsoll at Brighton (near Melbourne, you know); she's a connection of the Judge's, and

she says Winnie's the best girl that ever was; been supporting her invalid sister all this time, who was a year in the hospital after her brother was killed, only just recovered strength and reason; even now has to be looked after. They say she belongs to a *really high family* in England. Came out here against the wishes of their relations. That's one reason why Winifred couldn't go back.'

'That's her real name,' said a young lady. 'I thought Winnie was like Tottie or Tiny, one of those names young men give girls for nicknames. And I suppose she became a barmaid because she could make more money in that way for her sister.'

'That is really the reason Mrs. Clearsoll gives me, and I, for one, feel heartily ashamed of myself for not having a little more Christian charity, and practising what I—no, scarcely that—what my husband preaches. And what else do you think?'

'No, you don't say so?'

'But I do; I'm sure you've all guessed it. She's going to be married to that nice Mr. Ravelston. They'll have enough to live quietly while he's studying for the bar, and they can take her sister to live with them; for she's better now.'

When the Assizes came to an end, after a fortnight's hard work, there was sufficient food for moral reflection, animated discussion, and interesting narration provided to last the maids and matrons of Eaglehawk until next Circuit Court.

The immediate consequences were chiefly in accordance with the oldest dramatic canons. The guilty were punished, virtue was rewarded. The sword of Justice was not raised in vain. Hewson was hanged. The robbers who stopped the coach and so nearly succeeded in carrying off the gold and the still more precious Winnie Charlesworth, were found guilty and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment. Juan Mon-

tana, who, it now appeared, had by his unmanly persecution been the cause of her leaving Melbourne for a provincial engagement, was tried on a charge of being accessory to the murder of Edward Dorcott. The evidence was not sufficiently clear to ensure a conviction, but so much came out on the trial that was damaging to his reputation that he was held to be morally guilty by every man in that crowded Court. He was hooted and pursued with yells of execration by the excited miners as he left the Court, and—crowning indignity—was refused admittance at the Puddlers' Arms. He disappeared on the next day, leaving his shares to be disposed of by an agent.

The Sphinx took advantage of the Judge's escort to proceed, presumably with safety on this occasion, to Melbourne; and in an early issue of the *Argus* appeared the following interesting announcement, in that corner of the journal to which ladies' eyes (it is alleged) are instinctively attracted :—

'MARRIAGES

'On Thursday, 20th November, by the Reverend Cyril Greatorex, at All Saints' Church, St. Kilda, Guy Pembroke Ravelston, second son of the Reverend Spencer Ravelston, of Coombe Rectory, Yorkshire, to Winifred Charlesworth, youngest daughter of the late Major Hugh Charlesworth-Glendon, of the 60th Rifles.'

'So her name wasn't Charlesworth after all,' said Mrs. Rapperton. 'That is only her Christian name. I hate all disguises.'

'It was, and it wasn't,' replied Mrs. Waterfield. 'I think she had a right to use any name that was really hers. Well, she has now changed it for good; and nothing that we Eaglehawk people say or think will matter much to her now.'

Mrs. Rapperton sniffed as one only partly convinced.

The society section of the same journal had a full and satisfying description of

the ceremony, in which no detail of the bride's costume (plain, but of rich material and fashionable make), or that of the bridesmaids, was omitted. The bride, by a curious coincidence, as that gentleman and his accomplished lady happened to be visiting Melbourne at the time, was 'given away' by the Honourable Sholto Douglas, R.N., while the bridesmaids were the daughters of His Honour Judge Lyndhurst. The happy pair left for Tasmania in the *Aurora* immediately after the ceremony.

There is but another incident needed as a sequel to this not wholly untruthful historiette, for which more than one parallel can be found in the earlier days of mining adventure and romance.

Within a year another journalistic announcement startled the watchful critics and sympathisers of Eaglehawk, who always paused as they noted the names of Mr. and Mrs. Ravelston among the more exclusive festivities of the metropolis.

'We are in a position to state that Mr. Ravelston, who, it will be remembered, has been acting as Associate to Mr. Justice Lyndhurst, will not apply, as was his intention, to be admitted to the Victorian Bar. In consequence of the death of a relative, reported by last mail, that gentleman succeeds to the baronetcy and estates which have been so long in his historic family. Sir Guy and Lady Ravelston will proceed to England, we are informed, by the *Malta* P. and O. steamer.'

. . . . . .

Rarely, indeed, in the strangely assorted collection of misfits which do duty in the world as people and their positions, are true lovers so harmoniously arranged as Sir Guy and Lady Ravelston. Both had endured privation patiently, faced danger unflinchingly. They are the better for the experience, not the worse. It is 'good for them to have suffered such things.' They are now enabled to more thoroughly enjoy

the full luxury of succession to an ancestral home, a proud position, an unencumbered rent-roll, with every material, social, and intellectual need more than supplied. They are yet fond of recurring, in private, to their 'colonial experiences'; while Lady Ravelston frankly confesses, now that all things have ended so well, that there was a certain charm and excitement about the wild goldfield days when she was enacting the *rôle* of 'the Sphinx of Eaglehawk.'

THE END

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